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The Authority of Scripture in the Early Zurich Reformation (1522-1540)

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Abstract: The decisive impulse of the Zurich Reformation was not a particular theological tenet or the religious experience of one single reformer. It was the discovery of the authority of God's Word. This discovery was essentially a liberating experience. Scripture was experienced as the place for encountering the living God, who is intrinsically a gracious God, and who correspondingly makes his will known to people. Given the circumstances of early modernity, it was, however, consequent and inevitable that in the process of restructuring a Christian society and church according to God's Word the Bible became the authoritative scripture., Abstract The decisive impulse of the Zurich Reformation was not a particular theological tenet or the religious experience of one single reformer. It was the discovery of the authority of God's Word. This discovery was essentially a liberating experience. Scripture was experienced as the place for encountering the living God, who is intrinsically a gracious God, and who correspondingly makes his will known to people. Given the circumstances of early modernity, it was, however, consequent and inevitable that in the process of restructuring a Christian society and church according to God's Word the Bible became the authoritative scripture.

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The Authority of Scripture in the Early Zurich Reformation (1522-1540)

By Peter Opitz, Zurich

The Discovery of Scriptural Authority as the Root and Impulse of the Zurich Reformation

The decisive impulse of the Zurich Reformation was not a particular theological tenet or the religious experience of one single reformer. It was the discovery of the authority of scripture. With the term *authority*, should first be realized here: the Bible was discovered as the place where God himself speaks to people. It was discovered and seriously considered the original and authentic location where God speaks, to which all human and churchly discourse as well as thought is authoritatively subordinate. In contrast to our contemporary notion of *authority* in which the idea of heteronomy always resonates, this discovery was essentially a liberating experience. Scripture was experienced as the place for encountering the living God, who is intrinsically a gracious God, and who correspondingly makes his will known to people. The scriptures replaced the traditional ecclesial locations for encountering God, those being the sacraments controlled by the church. Freedom is a central-keyword in Ulrich Zwingli's theology.¹ Given the circumstances of early modernity, it was, however, consequent and inevitable that in the process of restructuring a Christian society and church *according to God's Word* the Bible became the authoritative scripture. The norm that applies to all people and that everybody must know came from the place in which the liberating godly promise of Him was discovered. Thereby, freedom was institutionalized. Thus, repressive church rules and financial burdens were abolished. Moreover, at the same time, new norms were created, such as the regulation of Sunday service attendance.² Ultimately, all people should become acquainted with the Word of God and shape at least their outward lives accordingly. Thus, the entire development of the Zurich Reformation can be treated within the theme of the authority of scripture. In addition, it is also true: a comprehensive historical and theological treatment of our theme would necessarily flow into the theological and institutional development of the Reformation. Important establishments and fruits of the Zurich Reformation are only

¹ See Berndt Hamm, *Zwinglis Reformation der Freiheit* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1988); for the fundamentals of Zwingli's Theology and the beginning of the Zurich Reformation see also Gottfried Wilhelm Locher, *Die Zwinglische Reformation im Rahmen der europäischen Kirchengeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979); Peter Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).

² *Aktensammlung zur Geschichte der Zürcher Reformation*, ed. Emil Egli, (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1973), 653, no. 1535, Original Edition 1879.

later ramifications of the central relevance of the Bible, some of them being the establishment of the *Prophezey*, where beginning in 1525 the Bible was interpreted daily from the original languages,³ the numerous Zurich Bible prints and editions, beginning with the 1531 *Froschauer Bible*, the first complete edition of the Bible during the Reformation,⁴ or also the Zurich *Higher School* (*Schola Tigurina*), where the best Hebrew and Greek experts of that time were to be found.⁵

The following contribution must be limited; therefore, we will concentrate primarily on Ulrich Zwingli's understanding of the authority of scripture and thereby place the sources at the center. Yet, over and above this, the development of these understandings in the Zurich Reformation as it took place between 1519 and 1540 should still be conveyed.

Scripture as the Primary Place Where People Encounter God

Here we recall what is already familiar: as Zwingli acceded to his office as parish priest (*Leutpriester*) of the Zurich Gossmunster on 1. January 1519, he began a series in which he interpreted the Gospel of Mathew into the vernacular. The message that came across through this act was revolutionary. The impact becomes clear only when one realizes what it was that Zwingli broke away from with this; admittedly, there were a variety of church services and liturgies. However, the pericope tradition was practiced in all of medieval western Christendom. That is, a select few Bible texts that were arranged according to the liturgical year were recited in Latin, often in the form of a song. Normally the actual sermon was read from a sermon collection (*Homiliar*) consisting of citations from the church fathers and legends of the saints. The sacraments that stood at the center of the service were the most important pastoral ministry. By introducing sequential interpretation of the Bible, Zwingli demonstratively placed the Bible in front of church traditions. The scriptures no longer merely occurred as citations that were embedded in traditional liturgy whose center was the administration of the churchly sacraments; they became the primary place to encounter God. Moreover, at the same time, Zwingli's continuous exegesis made it clear that *God's Word* is not composed of selected passages, but from the entire Bible. Hence, the roots of both *sola scriptura* as well as *tota scriptura* are present. For Zwingli himself, his discovery was a journey that had already started years before. In hindsight, he wrote:

³ See Egli, *Aktensammlung*, 461, no. 971, 972.

⁴ Hans Rudolf Lavater, "Die Froschauer-Bibel 1531," in *Die Zürcher Bibel von 1531: Entstehung, Verbreitung und Wirkung*, ed. Christoph Sigrist (Zürich: TVZ, 2011), 64-141.

⁵ See *Schola Tigurina: Die Zürcher Hohe Schule und ihre Gelehrten um 1550, Katalog zur Ausstellung vom 25. Mai bis 10. Juli 1999*, ed. Hans Ulrich Bächtold (Zürich und Freiburg: Pano, 1999).

When I was younger, I gave myself overmuch to human teaching, like others of my day, and when about seven or eight years ago I undertook to devote myself entirely to the Scriptures I was always prevented by philosophy and theology. But eventually I came to the point where led by the Word and Spirit of God I saw the need to set aside all these things and to learn the doctrine of God direct from his own Word. Then I began to ask God for light and the Scriptures became far clearer to me – even though I read nothing else – than if I had studied many commentators and expositors.⁶

He began to draw conclusions even before his transition to Zurich:

Before anyone in this area had even heard of Luther, I began to preach the gospel of Christ in 1516 so that I never entered the pulpit without looking up the words which were to be read in the mass that day and expounding them on the basis of Scripture.⁷

With his move to Zurich, he openly broke with the tradition of the pericope sermon. Accordingly, in his work *Concerning the Forbidding of Food* that he published in the spring of 1522, after the Zurich Lenten Fast Breaking, he emphatically wanted “to let nothing other than scripture speak.”⁸

Thus, that Zwingli dedicated the sermon in which he presented his concerns to the Dominican nuns in the Closter Oetenbach to the theme *the Word of God* is no coincidence.⁹ It makes sense to look a bit closer at the sermon that appeared in print on 6. September 1522. The sermon is Zwingli’s first explicit reflection on the Bible and its *authority*, and it bore the title, *Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God*.¹⁰

The Clarity and Certainty of God’s Word

Zwingli begins his argumentation with a debate on theological tradition, for this purpose, he initially takes up Augustine’s teaching on *vestigia trinitatis*¹¹ but construes it differently. The image of God exists in people, according to Augustine, essentially through the capability of the human soul to reason, will, and remember. People are created with these attributes in order to know God. According to Augustine, people only find peace in the knowledge of God and in community with him.

⁶ Huldreich Zwingli *sämtliche Werke* (Corpus Reformationum 88-101), ed. Emil Egli et al. (Berlin, Leipzig, Zürich, 1905-), (abbreviation Z). Above citation in Zwingli, *Z I*, 380.

English translation of “Von Klarheit und Gewissheit des Wortes Gottes” in G. W. Bromiley, *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 49-95. All subsequent English translations are the author’s own when not otherwise noted.

⁷ Zwingli, *Z II*, 144-145. English translation: *Huldrych Zwingli Writings: The Defense of the Reformed Faith, Volume I*, trans. Edward Julius Furcha (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 116.

⁸ Zwingli, *Z I*, 91.

⁹ Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 59.

¹⁰ Original title, “Von Klarheit und Gewissheit des Wortes Gottes” in Zwingli, *Z I*, 328-384.

¹¹ See Augustinus, *De Trinitate* IX 11; X 10,18; XV, 7.

In a Reformed interpretation of the Church Father, Zwingli formulates by way of contrast:

I do not reject the opinion of Augustine, but I think that there are many things which give us an awareness of the divine likeness apart from those which Augustine singled out as the chief. There is in particular that looking to God and to the words of God which is a sure sign of the divine relationship, image and similitude within us.¹²

The similarity of people to God exists, according to Zwingli, not in some quality of the human soul, but rather in people's relatedness to the creator. The medium for this relationship of people to God is God's *Word*. Hence, the actual *imago Dei* lies in hearing God's Word and being able to understand it. However, the ontological disposition of people to the image of God is spoiled through sin. As a slave to sin, people cannot understand the Word of God using their own strength, indeed they do not want to; instead, people would rather worship gods of their own making and to fall deeper into slavery. Thus, the Word of God must come from the outside, and from outside, it must free the individual to exist again as the *image of God*. Because people are, however, created to be the image of God, it is not completely foreign to them. A person, who is freed by the Word of God, is brought back into fellowship with God the creator, and at the same time, the person finds himself or herself again as God's creature.

Zwingli draws conclusions from this for the human experience: one substantial effect of hearing and understanding God's Word is that a person rejoices over it. The Word of God is the *gospel*—good news. Thus the conclusion of the first section is:

So then, we have come to the point where, from the fact that we are the image of God, we may see that there is nothing which can give greater joy or assurance or comfort to the soul than the Word of its creator and maker.¹³

In a next step, Zwingli proves that the Word of God has the power to do this. The first sentence of this section reads, "The word of God is so sure and strong that if God wills all things are done the moment that he speaks his Word."¹⁴ He explicates and reasons this thesis with a simple enumeration of biblical texts and examples. The entire Bible demonstrates that God's Word is a creative word. As a creative word, it carries power in itself. It does not necessitate reassurance or people's interpretations. The Word itself and alone accomplishes what it says. God's Word "can never be

¹² Zwingli, *Z I*, 345; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 61.

¹³ Zwingli, *Z I*, 353; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 68.

¹⁴ Zwingli, *Z I*, 353; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 68.

undone destroyed or resisted.”¹⁵ The strength of this Word of God is justified by pointing to its origin; in it, God the creator himself indeed seizes the Word.¹⁶

Out of this strength, it is apparent to Zwingli that the Word of God is clear and intelligible, and brings this clarity with itself.¹⁷ Zwingli proves this too from scripture itself. What Zwingli has in mind with this clarity is not a rejection of philology. For him, it is much more about the theological dimension of the Bible—about the Bible as the location where God speaks. The biblical narrative:

[...] will be enough to show conclusively that God’s Word can be understood by a man without any human direction: not that this is due to man’s own understanding, but to the light and Spirit of God, illuminating and inspiring the words in such a way that the light of the divine content is seen in his own light, as it says in Psalm 35 (A.V. 36): “For with thee, Lord, is the well of light, and in thy light shall we see light.”¹⁸

The close nexus of *God’s Word*, the *Spirit of God*, and *light* is central to Zwingli’s understanding of scripture. Here he aligns himself particularly with the Gospel of John, in which these expressions are combined closely with one another in reference to Christ: “In John 1 it says that the Word, or Son, of God was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”¹⁹ On the other hand, the Word of God is nothing other than “God himself.”²⁰ Substantially, at its core, it is the Christ-message. Thus, the second thesis of the first Zurich disputation reads:

The summary of the gospel is that our Lord Christ, true Son of God, has made known to us the will of his heavenly Father and has redeemed us from death and reconciled us with God by his guiltlessness.²¹

Taking this into consideration, what Zwingli meant when he spoke of a “spiritual understanding” for understanding scripture becomes comprehensible: here he means a Bible reading that considers the biblical testimony God’s personal testimony. It seeks within scripture “the light” or “the light and Spirit of God, illuminating and inspiring the words in such a way that the light of the divine content is seen in his own light,” as already cited in the text above. The opposite of this is a reading of the Bible according to the categories of natural human understanding in which sinful

¹⁵ Zwingli, *Z I*, 357; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 72.

¹⁶ Zwingli, *Z I*, 357; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 72 et seq.

¹⁷ Zwingli, *Z I*, 361-371; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 75-83.

¹⁸ Zwingli, *Z I*, 365 Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 78.

¹⁹ Zwingli, *Z I*, 365; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 78.

²⁰ Zwingli, *Z I*, 365; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 79.

²¹ Zwingli *Z II*, 27; Furcha, *Reformed Faith*, 14.

people assimilate “human understanding” that hampers God from speaking his own Word.²²

The clarity of scripture that Zwingli is talking about in our context differs therefore from a compilation of declarative sentences that no longer allows room for interpretation. To the argument that scripture contains numerous dark passages and that because of this the church must necessarily serve as the expositor, Zwingli replies that even discourse that appears to be veiled can in the end stand in the service of God’s revelation, because it prompts people to want to know God’s truth.²³

If the Word of God in fact carries his own strength and clarity, then it must also by itself and alone affect the certainty (*certitudo*) in the believer to know that it is the Word of God.²⁴ On this point, Zwingli refers back to the Spirit. The Spirit is, however, not free and independent from the Bible. It is exactly the Spirit of whom the biblical narrative reports, and who works in the Bible and speaks through it. The Spirit is therefore, for Zwingli, the bridge between the biblical narrative and contemporary experience. For Zwingli, the knowledge of the Word of God in scripture is a real experience. A person “can feel in himself or herself” that they are “enlightened by God.”²⁵ In this case, a certainty that is based strictly on the Bible and not a mystical experience is implied. What’s more, even the criterion that make the presence of the godly Spirit identifiable and *discernable*, those that also provide information as to whether or not the Bible is being read properly, are to be found nowhere else other than in the Bible itself. When a person’s experiences correspond to those of people in the biblical texts who have reported being affected by the Word of God, the criteria are fulfilled. Zwingli puts together an entire list of such criteria at the end of his text. Several of these are presented below:

Fifth, it is of the very nature of the Word that it humbles the high and mighty and exalts the lowly. That was the song of the Virgin Mary, ‘He has pulled down the mighty from their thrones and exalted them of low degree.’ And ‘By him shall all the hills be brought low and the valleys filled.’

Sixth, the Word of God always draws and assists the poor, comforts the comfortless and despairing, and opposes those who trust in themselves, as Christ also says.

Seventh, it does not seek its own advantage and for that reason Christ ordered his disciples not to take along with them script or purse.

²² Zwingli, *Z I*, 380; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 91 et seq.

²³ Zwingli, *Z I*, 358; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 73.

²⁴ Zwingli, *Z I*, 382; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 93.

²⁵ Zwingli, *Z I*, 383; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 93. Translation adapted by author.

Eighth, it only desires that God be made known to people, that the stubborn may revere him and the lowly find comfort in God. Those who preach that are undoubtedly right. But those who cautiously beat around the bush for their own advantage, defending the human teaching of men rather than explaining the doctrine of God are false prophets. Know them by what they say! They make much of _the holy Fathers 'and _what men can do' and the like. But for all their complaining they do not complain about the Gospel of Christ being lazily proclaimed.

Ninth, when you discover that the Word of God renews you, and becomes more valuable to you than when you heard only the doctrines of men, then you can be sure that God is at work in you.

Tenth, when you learn that it gives you assurance of the grace of God and eternal salvation, it is of God.

Eleventh, when you discover that it crushes and destroys you but glorifies God himself within you, it is surely God at work.

Twelfth, when you discover that reverence for God gives you joy instead of sorrow it is certain that the Word and the Spirit of God are working in you.²⁶

Establishing the Authority of the Bible in the Internal Controversies

Zwingli's thought can only be correctly understood within the controversies of his own times. And it continued to develop during these controversies. The same applies to his understanding of biblical authority. In the following, a brief glance will be cast over these further developments, and beyond Zwingli's death.

The First Hermeneutical Conflict

Zwingli's followers and thereby the number of those who based their arguments on the authority of scripture grew very quickly, especially after the Zurich Council's decision following the first Disputation of January 1523, which held that from then on "godly scripture" should be the foundation and criterion for all sermons.²⁷ In various homes throughout the city, circles were formed for studying the Bible and this without any instruction from officers of the church. Pastors in the countryside preached the *Word of God* as they themselves learned it from the Bible and preached social revolutionary ideas to the farmers. The Zurich Bible movement became heterogeneous. Because of this, however, it was fundamentally jeopardized, as Zwingli indeed correctly recognized.

²⁶ Zwingli, *Z I*, 383-384; Bromiley, *Zwingli*, 94-95.

²⁷ Egli, *Aktensammlung*, no. 318, 112.

In one work with the title *Whoever Gives Rise to Rebellion*²⁸ printed at the end of 1524, Zwingli sought to give the Reformation a clear direction. It followed, of course, that this could only happen by engaging scripture. Moreover, for this reason, the necessity to develop criterion for a correct understanding of the *Word of God* in the Bible occurred all by itself. At the same time, however, the Anabaptist movement was invoking scripture, which endangered the unity of the Christian politico-religious community. In addition, the farmers, who demanded the abolition of interests, thereby, threatened to bring the economic system out of balance.²⁹

Without being able to go more deeply into the social historical background here, we will take a look at the criterion that Zwingli formulated for correctly handling the Bible as an authority in light of these threats. According to Zwingli, the Bible only gets a correct reading when read primarily with a theological view to the relationship between God and people, while taking its soteriological function seriously. Through it, God reveals his Word of salvation to people, and "*whenever God reveals his Word, he wills to heal.*"³⁰ In addition, the Word of God first achieves the recognition of the individuals "depravity" and the necessity for grace.³¹ Finally, a right knowledge of God's Word effects love. The life of someone who hears the Word of God grows "to be equable with God's Word."³² This is also relevant in terms of relating to an opponent, "*I do not want to achieve anything hereby, other than that people do not rob the Pope of his power out of hate, but rather out of love to God and to their neighbors.*"³³ Using the Bible as a weapon in the struggle for one's own purposes and by-passing the indispensable first step of reading the Bible is, therefore, identified as abuse.

For dealing with specific biblical texts, Zwingli formulated three additional foundational hermeneutical rules: if two scholars are in conflict about a Bible text, the one is considered correct, "*who can produce one clear Bible word that he interprets in the manner of the faith, also in terms of the apostolic symbol of faith.*"³⁴ Should two clear Bible words stand in opposition, "*in this case, see which of them places more trust in the Word of God than people.*"³⁵ Finally, regressing to the Old Testament should treat questions that cannot be answered based on the New Testament.³⁶

²⁸ Zwingli, *Z III*, 375-469. German title, *Wer Ursache gibt zur Aufruhr*.

²⁹ Zwingli, *Z III*, 383, 347.

³⁰ See Zwingli, *Z III*, 380.

³¹ Zwingli, *Z III*, 382.

³² Zwingli, *Z III*, 383.

³³ Zwingli, *Z III*, 383.

³⁴ Zwingli, *Z III*, 408.

³⁵ Zwingli, *Z III*, 408.

³⁶ Zwingli, *Z III*, 409.

Thus, on the one side, Zwingli clearly bound interaction with the Bible together with the function of the Bible, because, if the Bible is a place in which the godly Word is encountered, then its interpretation must correspond to this. On the other side, this did not solve all of the questions. Developing the necessary exegetical rules and methods became more urgent, especially with a view to the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

As an exegete and Bible translator, Zwingli himself was increasingly occupied with such rules, and in the course of this, he referred back to his humanist education.³⁷ Precisely his conviction of the authority of the Bible, due to its theological clarity as a self-revelation of God, brought forth his desire to strive for the exact meaning of the Word using the best available philosophical doctrine and methods.

The Prophezey and Zurich Higher School

On 19. June 1525, the so-called *Prophezey* began its commission as a vital institution for securing the authority of the Bible. The school became a Europe-wide prototype for Reformed higher education. The three ancient languages stood at its center, especially the consecutive interpretation of the Old Testament. Professors and pastors read, interpreted, and translated texts from the Hebrew Bible in the form of an Old Testament seminar that was simultaneously shaped into a church service. In the end, lay people were presented the results in the form of a vernacular sermon. The Zurich Bible translations grew from this institution, which was the joint effort of a scholarly community from the start.

Under the leadership of Heinrich Bullinger, this institution gained permanent institutional status in 1532. The Zurich Higher School (*Schola Tigurina*) came into being —having teaching plans and established professor's chairs. With Konrad Pellikan, Theodor Bibliander, and Peter Martyr Vermigli there were leading European Old Testament scholars instructing at the Higher School.³⁸ Herewith, an effort was made to combine the best worldly wisdom in the humanist tradition together with the theologically motivated Reformation of the church and society. The Zurich Reformation always held Erasmus in high esteem as a philologist and exegete, despite the fact of clearly visible theological differences.³⁹

³⁷ See also Peter Opitz, "The Exegetical and Hermeneutical Work of John Oecolampadius: Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, Volume II, From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, eds. Magne Saebø, Michael Fishbane, and Jean Louis Ska (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 106–159.

³⁸ See also Bächtold, *Schola Tigurina*.

³⁹ See Peter Opitz, "Reformation im Dienst der Förderung der 'bonae litterae' am Beispiel hermeneutischer Grundentscheidungen zu Beginn der Zürcher 'Hohen Schule,'" in *Departure to*

The Authority of the Bible in Propaganda and Defense

An inward view should finally be followed by a look at the outside and the challenges of the Reformation in Europe as seen from Zurich. After the consolidation of the Zurich Reformation that actually only took place after Zwingli's death, Zurich advanced to become the center of Reformed Protestantism in Europe. It was not until the last third of the 16th century that Zurich's leadership position was exceeded by that of Geneva. The consequence of the insight on the *clarity and certainty* of God's Word was the propagation of the authority of scripture. Thus, it is not surprising that Zwingli's successor Heinrich Bullinger, whose overall influence in Europe far surpassed that of Calvin for a long time,⁴⁰ dedicated a paper and sent it to the king of England in 1538 with the title *On the Authority of Holy Scripture, Its Certainty, Trustworthiness and Absolute Perfection*.⁴¹ The declared goal was to promote the Reformation in England. The situation had changed, however, because 16 years after Zwingli's work on the clarity and certainty of God's Word, the objections from the Catholic side were long since established. Herein they evoked the tradition and the continuity of the Old Church, the councils and dogma, and on top of this, that scripture only came to its authority inside of this tradition. Hence, it is also the tradition of the church that possesses the legitimacy to interpret scripture correctly. Against this background, Bullinger applied the characteristics that Zwingli had attributed to God's Word directly to the Bible, just as the title of his already mentioned writing demonstrates.⁴²

At the same time, Bullinger wanted to show that the Reformed appeal to scripture was no renewal, no break with tradition, but if anything, the true continuation of the Old Church meant to stand in agreement with the major Church Fathers. The proof of the strength, authority, and certainty of scripture through scripture was no longer sufficient. With respect to the claim that the church existed before the canon of scripture, now scripture had to be defended in its authority as

Modern Europe - Philosophy between 1400 and 1700, eds. Hubertus Busche and Stefan Hessbruegggen-Walter (Hamburg: Meiner, 2011), 754-764.

⁴⁰ See Peter Opitz, *Heinrich Bullinger als Theologe: Eine Studie zu den Dekaden* (Zürich: TVZ, 2004); see also *Heinrich Bullinger: Life – Thought – Influence*, 2 vols., eds. Emidio Campi and Peter Opitz (Zürich: TVZ, 2007).

⁴¹ German title, "Von der Autorität der Heiligen Schrift, ihrer Gewissheit, Zuverlässigkeit und absoluten Vollkommenheit" in *Heinrich Bullinger Theologische Schriften Bd. 4: De scripturae sanctae autoritate deque episcoporum institutione et functione: (1538)*, eds. Emidio Campi together with Philipp Wälchli (Zürich: TVZ, 2009), (abbreviation HBTS 4). For German translation see *Heinrich Bullinger: Schriften*, Vol. II, eds. Emidio Campi, D. Roth, and Peter Stotz (Zürich: TVZ, 2004-2007).

⁴² Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 1.

the canon of scripture, for instance, by proving the identity of the content of scripture with the oral tradition in the times before Moses:⁴³

Then what Scripture is to us, was in the past the living voice of God, that was proclaimed by angels to our fathers and forefathers, but then later through the recommendations and sermons of the Fathers like a letter that is delivered by hand [...] the written and proclaimed gospel is the same and nothing else.⁴⁴

However, the authority of scripture was also confirmed through the godly legitimization of the first biblical author.⁴⁵ In addition to this, it gained authority through the high praise of scripture by the church fathers, especially Augustine,⁴⁶ and likewise through the church councils recognition of the authority of scripture,⁴⁷ but above all, through the evidence of the significance and authority of scripture, including the Old Testament, as far back as Jesus and the Apostles.⁴⁸

Bullinger did not abandon Zwingli's foundation; ultimately it was the self-evidence of God's Word in scripture, since it "cannot be confirmed through any human authority." For him, in this case, additional arguments from the church authorities, but also from history, were not excluded. Numerous citations from the antic authors vouch that Moses was older than Kadmos the legendary founder of Thebens, as well as Homer, but also compared to the ancient Greek philosophers.⁴⁹ Moreover, the spiritually highly advanced character of the biblical writings testify to its own authority,⁵⁰ and the usefulness of scripture in view of piety and virtue in conduct is emphasized.⁵¹

All of these are helpful for Bullinger's arguments that do not question the self-evidence of scripture, but are, nevertheless, formulated. In opposition to the Roman objection that scripture contains an imperfect doctrine, which requires the supplement of tradition, now at the same time, it needed proof "that the scriptural canon is completely perfect in every way," and "that it contains what is necessary for true godliness."⁵²

With respect to the King of England, Bullinger praises the Bible as an "infallible plumb line for everything that should be done, and everything that should be avoided." Scripture is God's "eternal and irrevocable Word" in agreement with

⁴³ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 22-25.

⁴⁴ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 23.

⁴⁵ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 25-38.

⁴⁶ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 28-31.

⁴⁷ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 40-41.

⁴⁸ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 32-36; 81-84.

⁴⁹ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 44.

⁵⁰ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 53-62.

⁵¹ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 62.

⁵² Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 101.

"heaven and earth" that is preserved throughout history as "invincible power."⁵³ That one can only convince a King of England to consider scripture as the foundation of his church reform in this manner is obvious. Thereby, the function of the Bible did shift away from that of Zwingli's 1522 sermon.

The empirical context of the Bible had changed as can be seen in a comparison between Zwingli and Bullinger's understanding of the *strength* of God's Word. Zwingli especially associated its aliveness and creative efficacy, "See how vital and strong the Word is that not only has power over all things, but creates out of nothing whatever it will."⁵⁴ The knowledge of the freedom of God's Word stands behind this, freedom from churchly constraints and false religiosity. Bullinger, on the other hand, combined "cohesiveness" and "consistency in particular" with the "strength" of God's Word.⁵⁵ It is comparable with the unchanging law of creation, roughly with the course of the stars.⁵⁶ The "truth in scripture is enduring, steadfast, and unshakable –everlasting, because it is the decree of the eternal, true and almighty."⁵⁷

It would be false to see here in contrast to Zwingli's scriptural understanding as a dynamic power only petrified dogmatic. For Bullinger, a living experience with scripture stands in the background too—it is the persecution and affliction of the Christian church suffered repeatedly throughout the centuries. With a view to Protestantism in Bullinger's day, this was a real concern. And precisely in the situation of the persecuted church that did not appear successful to those outside, scripture was tried and trusted as the powerful and dependable Word of God, that "cannot be shaken by any human power", but is "completely and totally insurmountable."⁵⁸ In his *Institutes*, Calvin was able to take up both Zwingli's relational definition of God's Word and Spirit as well as Bullinger's argumentation for the authority of scripture.⁵⁹

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⁵³ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 67 et seq.

⁵⁴ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 102.

⁵⁵ Zwingli, *Z I*, 119; Bromiley, Zwingli, 68.

⁵⁶ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 44 et seq.

⁵⁷ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 45.

⁵⁸ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 44 et seq.

⁵⁹ See J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, transl. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville/London, The Westminster Press), 1960 (reissued 2006), I, VI-IX, 69-96.